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# Families, Places, and Food Insecurity in Households with Young Children

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Household food insecurity is an inability to access adequate food for a healthy, active lifestyle (USDA)

Year	Food insecurity in households with children (%)	Food insecurity among children (%)	Very low food security among children (%)
1998	17.6	9.5	0.9
1999	15.2	8.2	0.6
2000	16.2	8.6	0.7
2001	16.5	8.4	0.6
2002	16.7	8.9	0.5
2003	17.6	9.0	0.7
2004	15.6	8.2	0.6
2005	15.6	8.4	0.6
2006	15.6	8.3	0.6
2007	21.0	11.0	1.3
2008	21.0	10.6	1.2
2009	20.2	9.5	1.0
2010	21.0	10.6	1.3
2011	20.6	10.0	1.2
2012	20.0	9.9	1.1
2013	19.5	9.4	0.9
2014	18.6	8.0	0.7
2015	16.5	7.7	0.6
2016	15.7	7.7	0.7
2017	15.7	7.7	0.7

Source: Calculated by USDA, Economic Research Service, using Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/>

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## COVID-19 is making matters much worse

Category	Share (%)
Mothers with children 12 and under (2018)	~18
All households	~23
Households with children under 18	~35
Mothers with children 12 and under	~42

Source: COVID Impact Survey April 2020; Brookings Institution Hamilton Project and Future of the Middle Class Initiative Survey of Mothers with Young Children April 2020; Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement 2018; author's calculations.

Note: Data for all households and households with children under 18 are from the COVID Impact Survey. Data for mothers with children under 12 are from the Brookings Institution Hamilton Project and Future of the Middle Class Initiative Survey of Mothers with Young Children. Both surveys have been weighted to be nationally representative for the population that they describe. In the Survey of Mothers with Young Children, respondents were asked: "Within the last 12 months, how often have you or your household been short on food (couldn't afford the groceries you needed)?" The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more. The children in my household were not eating enough because we just didn't afford enough food." In the COVID Impact Survey, respondents were asked: "Please indicate whether the following statements were often true, sometimes true, or never true for you or your household over the past 30 days. We worried our food would run out before we got money to buy more. The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more." Neither survey administered the complete food insecurity ladder as administered in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement. The statistics for each of these individual questions were reported in the Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement for 2018.

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## Living in a food insecure household associates with several negative children's outcomes<sup>a,b,c</sup>

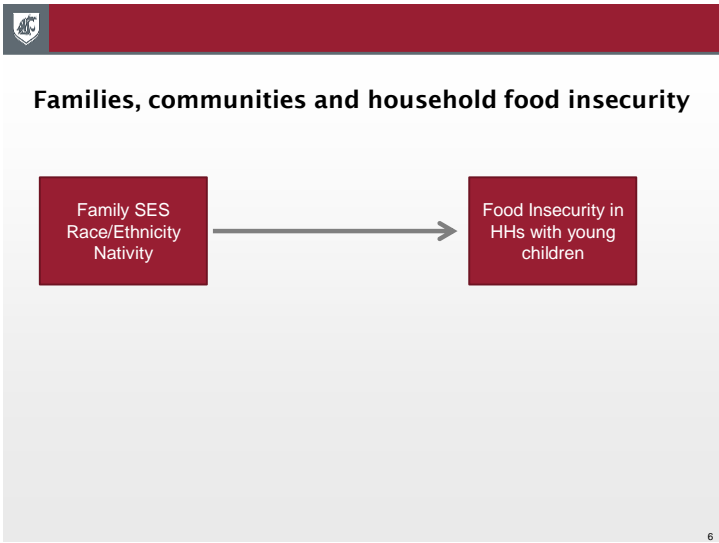
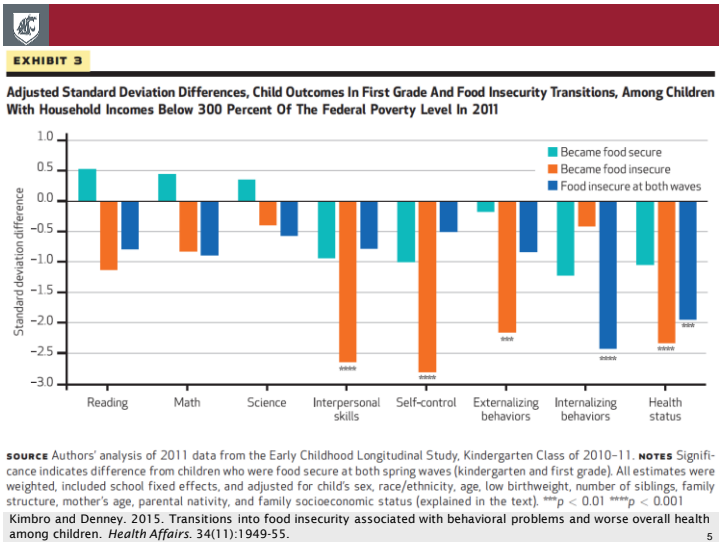
- Developmental deficits
- Worse health
- Academic achievement deficits
- Increased suicidal intentions and depression


<sup>a</sup>Alaimo, K., C. M. Olson, and E. A. Frongillo, Jr. 2001. "Food insufficiency and American school-aged children's cognitive, academic, and psychosocial development." *Pediatrics* 108:44-53.


<sup>b</sup>Kirkpatrick, S.J., L. McIntyre, and M.L. Potestio. 2010. "Child hunger and long-term adverse consequences for health." *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 164:754.

<sup>c</sup>Ryu, Jeong-Hee, and Judith S. Bartfield. 2012. "Household food insecurity during childhood and subsequent health status: the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort." *American Journal of Public Health* 102:e50-e55.

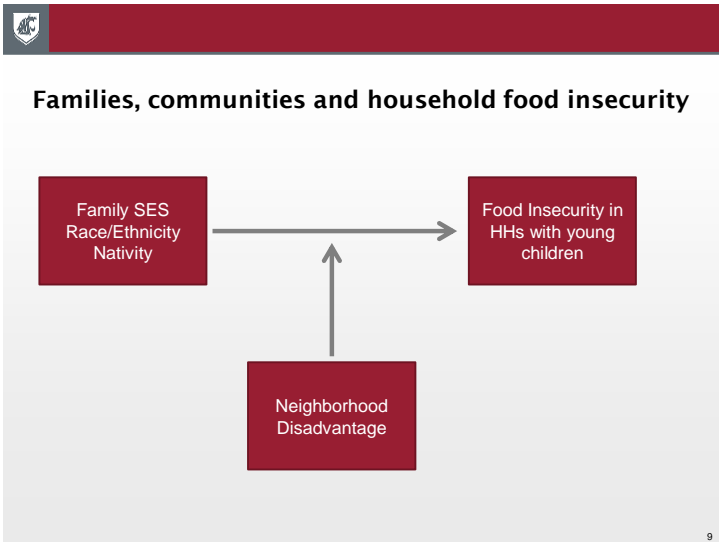
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- Established Individual and Family Predictors of Food Insecurity
- Age of mother and child
  - Family structure
    - Single parent home; number of siblings
  - Duration at residence
  - Maternal (or caretaker) health and citizenship status
  - **Race/ethnicity and nativity status**
  - **Socioeconomic status (SES)**
    - Household income, parental occupational prestige, parental education
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- Disparities in household food insecurity by race, ethnicity, and nativity in the U.S.
- Race/ethnicity of households with children, 2016<sup>a</sup>
    - White, non-Hispanic 9.3%
    - Black, non-Hispanic 22.5%
    - Hispanic 18.5%
  - Estimated 46% of children with Mexican immigrant parents experienced food insecurity from 1999-2009<sup>b</sup>
- <sup>a</sup>Coleman-Jensen A, Gregory C, Singh A. 2017. Household food insecurity in the United States in 2016, ERR-237, USDA, Economic Research Service.

<sup>b</sup>Potochnick S, Arteaga I. 2018. A decade of analysis: household food insecurity among low-income immigrant children. *Journal of Family Issues*. 39(2):527-51.
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### A Sociological Perspective on Why Places Might Influence Well-being

- Structure (societal factors) vs. Agency (individual traits)
  - Which is it?

Diagram illustrating the relationship between Structure and Agency.

### A Sociological Perspective on Why Places Might Influence Well-being

- Structure (societal factors) vs. Agency (individual traits)
  - Which is it?

Diagram illustrating the relationship between Structure and Agency.

- Agency and Structure operate in tandem in social situations
- Certain situations may show greater influence of one over the other

Photo credit: Getty stock photos



### Unhealthy places – Composition or Context?

- Is health worse in disadvantaged neighborhoods because a lot of disadvantaged people live there or do neighborhoods influence health beyond individual status?
  - Both
    - The more disadvantaged the n'hood the worse the health of residents
    - N'hoods themselves can promote poor health
  - The importance of 'Both'\*
    - Neighborhood disadvantages can negatively affect the health of residents over and above the effects of personal disadvantages
      - Living in a n'hood with danger, crime, lack of civility (disorder), environmental toxins, and/or low social capital can impact well-being regardless of individual attributes

\*Ross, Catherine E., and John Mirowsky. 2001. "Neighborhood Disadvantage, Disorder, and Health." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 42:258-276.  
Boardman, Jason D., Jarron M. Saint Onge, Richard G. Rogers, and Justin T. Denney. 2005. "Race Differentials in Obesity: The Impact of Place." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 46:229-243.

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### How might neighborhoods or communities matter for food insecurity in households that include children?

1. Family and neighborhood disadvantages accumulate
  - i.e. The poorest families in the poorest neighborhoods might face special heightened risks
2. Perhaps a mismatch between family and neighborhood characteristics gives rise to unique patterns of risk
  - Contextual Incongruence – poor families in more advantaged neighborhoods worse off than poor families in less advantaged neighborhoods
  - This approach might help us understand how so many poor families remain food secure

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[www.healthykidschallenge.com](http://www.healthykidschallenge.com)

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### How might neighborhoods or communities matter for food insecurity in households that include children?

*Family Socioeconomic Adversity by Neighborhood Concentrated Disadvantage*

- Family Socioeconomic Adversity
  - A household measure of socioeconomic conditions
    - Higher values = more disadvantaged household
- Neighborhood Concentrated Disadvantage
  - A neighborhood measure of social and economic conditions
    - Higher values = more disadvantaged neighborhood

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## Family and Child Data

- 2010-2011 Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Sample (ECLS-K), restricted & geocoded
  - Nationally representative data on a cohort of kindergarteners – can take advantage of the kids' clustering in schools because they also cluster in neighborhoods
  - Large sample size (N ~ 18,000 kindergarteners; N ~ 12,800 with food insecurity and geocode)
  - Kids (level 1) clustered in neighborhoods (level 2)
    - ~3,800 neighborhoods

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## Household food insecurity

- 18 – item scale endorsed by the US Department of Agriculture
  - For example...
    - In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?
    - In the last 12 months, was [child] ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?
  - Yes to 3 or more items = Food insecure\*

\*Bickel, Gary, Mark Nord, Cristofer Price, William Hamilton, and John Cook. 2000. "Guide to Measuring Household food security, revised 2000." Alexandria, VA: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

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## Neighborhood Data

- ECLS-K data linked to...
  - 2007-2011 American Community Survey data at the census tract level
    - Concentrated disadvantage
      - % Poverty; % Female-headed HHs; % HHs receiving public assistance; % Unemployed (natural logs)
  - 2010 North American Industry Classification System data at the census tract level
    - Food retail and social organizations measures

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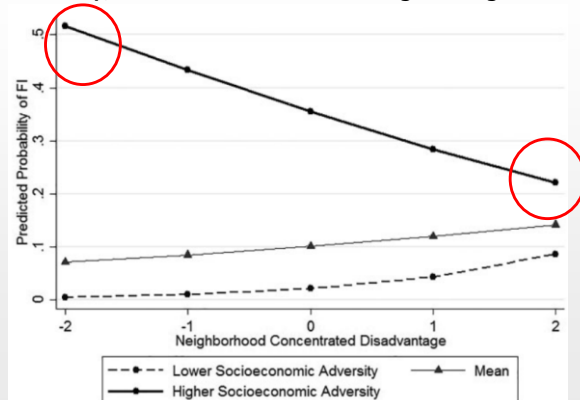
## Method

- Multi-level logistic regression\*
    - Children (level 1) nested in neighborhoods (level 2)
1. Does neighborhood SES matter for food insecurity?
    - Controlling for level 1 and level 2 characteristics
  2. How might neighborhood SES matter?
    - Interactions between family SES (level 1) and neighborhood SES (level 2)

\*Guo, G. and H. Zhao (2000). "Multilevel Modeling for Binary Data." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 441-462.

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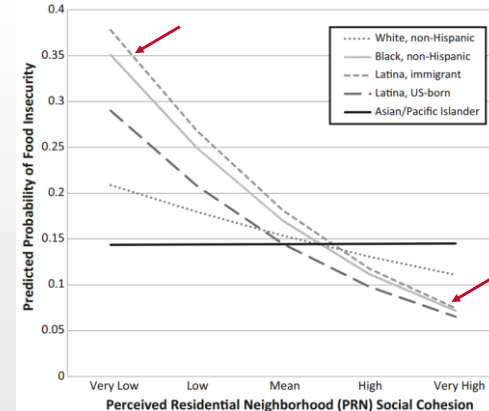
### Fully adjusted predicted probability of household food insecurity, U.S. households with kindergarten age children



Source: Denney, Kimbro, and Sharp. 2018. "Neighborhoods and Food Insecurity in Households with Young Children: A Disadvantage Paradox?" *Social Problems* 65:342-59.

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### Fully adjusted predicted probability of food insecurity, by race/ethnicity, nativity, and perceived neighborhood social cohesion



Source: Denney et al. 2017. "Social Cohesion and Food Insecurity: Insights from the Geographic Research on Wellbeing (GROW) Study." *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 21:343-50.

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### Discussion and Implications

- Food insecurity in households with young children is pervasive and a possible life course disparity setting condition
- Family indicators are vitally important but not the whole story
- Neighborhoods matter in unique ways
- Target policies toward communities
  - Efforts to improve access to community advantages as well as efforts to address community disadvantages are vital to understanding how place matters and to reducing disparities

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### Counseling Tips

- Things are going to get much worse before they get better
  - Do whatever it takes to get information about food and where to find it into the hands of at-risk populations in all types of communities
- Consider that the community in which at-risk families reside may promote or discourage access to food.
  - Informal channels in communities (i.e. social networks, positive sense of community, looking out for neighbors, community investment) might be harnessed to increase access to food security

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## Thank you

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